

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) An instrument for distracting an intervertebral space, the instrument comprising:

a plying device having an actuation handle, an intermediate portion and a first longitudinal axis extending through a center of said actuation handle toward said intermediate portion, two distal ends, and said plying device further having a distraction end extending outwardly from said intermediate portion, wherein said distraction end includes - two opposing fork-shaped extensions extending from said intermediate portion~~distal ends~~ of said plying device, each of said ~~forks~~ fork-shaped extensions including a base, two tines extending outwardly from said base, and a second longitudinal axis parallel to said two tines and centered between said two tines, wherein said second longitudinal axis is off-set from said first longitudinal axis, said fork-shaped extensions, each including~~comprising~~ an interior side, said interior sides facing each other and, said interior sides comprising a contour adapted to releasably grasp therebetween an artificial intervertebral disc.

2. (cancelled)

3. (currently amended) The instrument according to claim 1, said fork-shaped extensions further comprising an elongated section, ~~terminating in a substantially U shaped member comprising a base oriented substantially perpendicular to the base, elongated section and a pair of laterally spaced tines oriented substantially perpendicular to the base.~~

4. (original) The instrument according to claim 3 wherein one of said tines is longitudinally aligned with the elongated section.

5. (original) The instrument according to claim 3 the base of the U-shaped member further comprising a vertebral body stop.

6. (original) The instrument according to claim 5 said vertebral body stop comprising a forward ridge surface oriented perpendicular to the tines' outwardly facing surfaces.

7. (original) The instrument according to claim 1 said interior side comprising a notch formed therein for accommodating a vertebral body stop of a disc manipulation instrument.

8. (original) The instrument according to claim 1 said interior side comprising a curved profile.

9. (original) The instrument according to claim 1 said fork-shaped extensions having exterior sides, said exterior sides comprising vertebral endplate contacting surfaces which, in response to pressure applied to said plying device, distract said intervertebral space.

10. (original) The instrument according to claim 1, said interior sides comprising at least one curved facing profile defining an opening dimensioned to permit an intervertebral disc having at least one exterior curved contour to be positioned between the fork-shaped extensions.

11. (currently amended) The instrument according to claim 1, wherein said plying device comprising a plying device having at least two hinges.

12. (currently amended) The instrument according to claim 1 wherein said fork-shaped extensions are releasably detachable from said ~~plying device~~ intermediate portion of said plying device.

13. (cancelled)

14. (cancelled)

15. (cancelled)

16. (currently amended) A system comprising:

an instrument including an actuation handle having a proximal end, a distal end, and a longitudinal axis extending therethrough, said instrument further including~~comprising a plying device comprising~~ opposing fork-shaped extensions extending from said distal proximal end to said distal end ends of said actuation handle~~plying device~~, said fork-shaped extensions having interior sides facing each other, the interior sides forming a passage dimensioned to accommodate the passage of an artificial intervertebral disc; each of said fork-shaped extensions further including a base, two tines extending outwardly from said base, and a second longitudinal axis centered between said two tines, wherein said second longitudinal axis is off-set and parallel to said first longitudinal axis; and

at least one artificial intervertebral disc having an upper baseplate and a lower baseplate;

wherein the fork-shaped extensions of said instrument are adapted to engage the upper and lower baseplates of said disc.

17. (currently amended) The system according to claim 16, said baseplates further comprising a centrally disposed dome and teeth disposed apart from said dome, forming a space, and said tines of said fork-shaped extensions comprising tines are dimensioned to fit into said spaces for grasping said disc.